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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000760

DEPT FOR SE GRATION, S/USSES, AF A/S CARSON, AF/C
NSC FOR MGAVIN
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
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SUBJECT: DARFURI FEMALE STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF KHARTOUM BEATEN
AND SUBSEQUENTLY ARRESTED

REF: 2008 KHARTOUM 847

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Men dressed in black abayas (Note: an Islamic dress, common in Saudi Arabia but less so here, that covers a woman's entire body. End Note) reportedly raided a women's dormitory at the University of Khartoum in the early morning of June 11 and assaulted 15 Darfuri women. The following morning, the most severely-injured students sought treatment at a Khartoum hospital, but Sudanese police forced them to leave several hours later. Officers from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) detained some of the women and reportedly beat them during interrogation. The women are now staying at a safe house in Omdurman, but have no access to medical treatment. Although incidents of this type are far less common now than during the height of the Darfur war in 2003, this incident demonstrates that the regime continues to target individuals whom it views as opponents. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Wednesday, June 10, a fight between a Darfuri female student and a National Congress Party (NCP)-allied female student at the University of Khartoum erupted into a large brawl, pitting women from different political alignments against each other. According to Osman Mohamed Negeimi, head of the Darfur Students' Union (DSU) at the University of Khartoum, university authorities managed to quell the fighting, and the students returned to their dormitories. However, at 1 a.m. on Thursday, June 11, men wearing long, all-black abayas entered the rooms of the all-women's dormitory and beat 15 female students, injuring five severely.

¶3. (SBU) Speaking with poloff on June 15 at a safe house in Omdurman, victims and witnesses of the assault said that eight men in black abayas gained access to their dormitory and awoke them by yelling offensive statements and threatening to rape them. The men used their fists and feet to attack them, and they also hit them with metal cables wrapped in plastic, an item commonly used in Sudan to lock gates. According to the women, the violent assault lasted more than 15 minutes, and 15 women were injured, five critically enough to require immediate hospitalization. Several of the women reportedly wrestled one man to the ground during the attack, removed his abaya and his shirt to confirm he was disguised as a woman. One woman told poloff that her attacker threatened to rape her, and when she resisted, he began beating her. None of the women reported being raped, but all said that they feared sexual assault during the attack. The women said that the men also stole items from their rooms, including laptop computers, money, and jewelry.

¶4. (SBU) After the attackers departed, officers from the NISS along with Sudanese police and university authorities, forced the women to free the male assailant whom they still held. He was then released without charges brought against him. Authorities permitted five women who were severely injured to go to a hospital for medical care, and polasst visited Khartoum Hospital on June 11 to meet with

the women in the intensive care unit. That day, a group of the women from the same dormitory, including those who had been assaulted, but had not sought medical treatment, attempted to visit the hospital but were detained by NISS. During their detention, the women were fingerprinted and interrogated, and forced to kneel with their heads facing the wall. Some women reported that their interrogators beat them with plastic PVC pipes on their backs and arms where they had received injuries during the assaults. Other women who had been more severely injured reported that NISS interrogators only threatened to beat them. All of the women witnessed the interrogations and confirmed each other's accounts of the beatings.

15. (SBU) On Thursday afternoon, June 11, Sudanese police forced the women in the intensive care unit from the hospital, and doctors there told them they could not return for treatment. The women took refuge in a safe house in Omdurman belonging to Sudanese Liberation Movement/Minni Minnawi (SLM/MM), where they have remained since the incident. The women have not received any additional medical treatment, and speaking with poloff and polasst on June 15 at the house, they said it was unlikely they would return to their university dormitory. During the visit by poloff, the fifteen victims displayed large black welts on their faces, legs, arms and backs. Several of the women complained of untreated injuries: one said she had a broken rib and a separated shoulder as a result of being thrown to the floor; one said her arm was broken in two places; another said she had been choked, and had a scar on her forearm from where a man bit her. The women also showed poloff digital photos of the most severely injured woman, who declined to meet with poloff; they reported that she had lost four teeth in the attack, and that her face was still swollen and bruised.

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16. (SBU) The women, who did not want to disclose their names, showed poloff the weapons their attackers left behind, including five of the flexible steel locks and long knives. Additionally, during their detention, the women's identity documents were cut, leaving them with no proper form of identification. The women said their attackers were not students, because they would have recognized if the man they wrestled to the floor had been a University of Khartoum student. Instead, they told poloff that they believed the men were members of NISS's security team that operates at the University of Khartoum. Negeimi agreed with their suspicions, saying that witnesses and victims reported that the men arrived in vehicles on the night of the attack (instead of on foot,) and that they knew the layout of both the campus and the interior of the women's dormitory.

17. (SBU) Speaking with poloff on June 16, Negeimi, head of the DSU, said that the attacks illustrate the NCP's culture of hostility toward Darfuris at Khartoum's universities. Negeimi said the attacks are similar in both mode and intent to the NISS assault of 20 Darfuri students in June 2008 (reftel). He reported that sexual harassment of students has increased since then, and observed that the universities in Khartoum are becoming less welcoming places for female students. He said the DSU does not intend to open a legal case following this attack, as it has already opened 20 unresolved cases with Khartoum police following thefts, physical assaults and incidents of sexual harassment against Darfuri students. Meanwhile, Negeimi reports that tensions among students continue to increase at the University of Khartoum. He reported that on June 11 two Darfuri students were injured when an NCP supporter threw a Molotov cocktail into a crowd of Darfuri students, and that on June 15 NISS detained two Darfuri students - Hassan Mohamed Ahmed and Muktar Adam - from the school's campus.

18. (SBU) Comment: The June 11 assault of 15 Darfuri female students, and their subsequent detention, show that although the atmosphere in Khartoum has improved since the height of the Darfur war in 2003, the NCP regime continues to intimidate and harass the Darfuri community here. The University of Khartoum will soon adjourn for summer vacation, but when students return in the fall, such problems will most likely continue. End comment.

ASQUINO